G. Smith

Missions of the
Free Church in India

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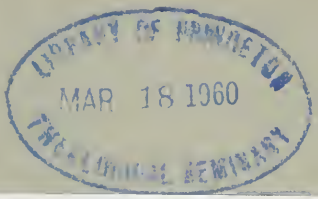

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MISSIONS

OF THE

FREE CHURCH IN INDIA.

AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE

The General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland,

MAY 23, 1871.

BY

GEORGE SMITH, LL.D.,

SERAMPORE,

EDITOR OF "THE FRIEND OF INDIA."

PROPERTY OF
PRINCETON
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ADDRESS.

Dr George Smith, Elder, next addressed the Assembly. He said he would confine himself to one or two points in which they were all interested, and which had been more or less controverted. It seemed to him as an outsider, looking not only at the missions of our Church, but at all Protestant missions in India, carried on by all denominations, that now at last this Church had projected and carried into execution a more perfect missionary policy, if he might so express it, than any other Church had yet been permitted to do. Up to the issuing of the present report, there could be no doubt that the Free Church mission was, in the eyes of many members of the Church, somewhat defective. This could no longer be said. In the first four pages of the report the subjects grouped themselves under the four great heads which comprehended the whole of their missionary operations. They had there the colleges and schools, which had been identified with what was called the educational system of missions. They had there also—and it was in this respect that up to this year their mission system had been defective—an account of success among the Ghonds, the nomination of a missionary to labour among the Santals, and generally statements concerning the work of pure evangelisation, as distinct from civilisation, among the aboriginal tribes. Then they had, thirdly, that noble institution, the Ladies' Society for carrying on Female Education in India. And lastly, and in one sense most important of all, as being the very source and root of their mission, they had the Chair of Evangelistic Theology now in full operation, not simply as an optional, but as a necessary part of the academic and theological course of the Church. It seemed to him that, so far as the outward machinery—that was, so far as the plan or policy of the Foreign Mission of the Free Church—was concerned, they were now perfect. What they wanted was that blessing from above which only the grace of God could give in answer to the prayers of His people, and that abounding and increasing liberality which they ought to display when an outwardly perfect scheme of missionary labour had thus been presented to them.

If he might for a moment be permitted to hint at a defect, he would say that, compared with what their ideal of a mission ought to be, and what other missions were in other Churches, they seemed to lack the home literary or intelligence part of the mission work. Those members of the Free Church in India who were interested in the success of missions were painfully aware that, whoever was to blame for it, there was not a sufficient literary expression given to the work that was done by their missions abroad. This was unjust to the missionaries on the spot, and it was unfair to the committee here. But these were slight evils compared with the fact, that the members of the Church were thus denied facts regarding the

Lord's work, or were misled by imperfect information. Increasing liberality on their part could not be expected, unless the whole truth were continually told them, and the whole Church were thus brought *en rapport* with the mission field and missionary workers. It seemed to Dr Smith that this defect could be very easily remedied. He could understand, from somewhat painful experience, how impossible it was for the editor to find space for all the matter sent to him for publication. But if they took an example in this respect from the Church Missionary Society of England—which, so far as he knew, issued the most perfect missionary publications in the world—they would either reserve the statement of accounts for quarterly publication, or have a special *Missionary Record* for the grown-up people, as for the children, devoted to the calm, intelligent, and catholic discussion of missionary questions, as well as to the communication of missionary information.

As to their colleges and schools, he could only bear testimony that more efficient educational institutions for their purpose—that was, institutions more efficient, not only educationally, but in the communication of religious instruction with a view to the changing of the human heart—they could not find. These colleges had shown their educational efficiency in all the three Presidencies, and also in Nagpore, by the position which the students took from year to year in the honour, as well as in the matriculation and degree lists of the three Universities of Calcutta, Madras, and Bombay. Indeed, so great had their success been, that it might be said that they stood at the head of the non-Government colleges—that was, of the colleges not directly taught, supervised, and supported by the State. He might be told, on the other hand, that the influence of the university system upon all their colleges in India had been of late of a secularising character. It must be confessed that, in proportion as the Universities had exacted a more accurate knowledge and a greater extent of knowledge, there seemed at first sight to have been a falling off in religion. The tendency in India, as here, was too much, under the influence of competition, to bring such a pressure to bear upon the students that the whole subject of religious instruction was apt to be pushed into a subordinate place. But before they came to that conclusion, they should take various circumstances into account. He would attribute the recent falling off in baptisms, not so much to the secularising effect of the Universities, as to the rationalising influence of that English and American literature with which education in India brings the students into such very close connection. No one who had not lived in India could understand the energetic and active power which such literature was exerting among the young men being taught there. The latest results of what is called free thought in England and America are imported into India by every mail, are eagerly expounded by several of the English newspapers conducted by Hindoos, and are revelled in by youths who mistake license for liberty. That tendency was directed and fed to a large extent by an influence to modify which their colleges had been at first established—the influence of highly-cultured gentlemen who went out as teachers in government colleges, and made use of their position as professors of philosophy to propagate the most extreme forms of philosophical and religious opinion with which many minds were occupied in this country. It was a notorious fact, which had been brought under the notice of Government, that several of the English professors of the Government Colleges in Bengal were avowed Comtists.

There were decidedly Christian men who were professors in Government colleges, but they were bound by their contract with Government not to utter one word of Christianity or religion, at least during the class hours. They might occupy their leisure as they pleased; and he rejoiced to say that more than one, notably one who is now a distinguished professor in Cambridge, and in the first rank of living Orientalists, had been the means of adding several to the Church as the result of Sunday and evening classes. But other professors, professors of philosophy and history, did not feel themselves bound to silence, even in the class, on the systems opposed to Christianity, and therefore propagated such views as those of the Comtist school with immense influence and success amongst the immature minds of the young men under their teaching. To the rationalising influence of that English literature, to the teaching of Government colleges, and to another influence upon which he would not dilate, the fact that the Brahmo Somaj arrested the minds of many young men at the very stage where they were impressible, and diverted them to the half-way house of a benevolent Theism—to these, much more than to the secularising effect of university education, might be attributed the falling off in the number of baptisms.

Now, what was the Church to do? Certainly they must not abandon their position as to education. If ever the time came when this Church, and the Foreign Committee of this Church, devoted less attention than they had hitherto given to what had been the glory of their mission, the colleges and schools which it had created, then the greatest blow would be given to the progress of Christianity in India which it had ever suffered. He thought he could show that it was to the university system that they owed very much the success of the mission colleges. If they asked his own opinion, as one who had no more interest in the matter than in any other Indian questions, he would say, that while there was a tendency on the part of the university system to secularise our missionary colleges, it was overbalanced to a great extent by the liberty the universities had given to these colleges. It rested with the Foreign Committee and the General Assembly of the Church to neutralise that secularising influence, so far as it existed, by means of missionaries who, the more rigorously the Universities insisted on a high standard of secular knowledge, should the more zealously propagate Christian truth. He could not help thinking that morning, when listening to the discussion on the Education Committee's report, that the treatment of the religious question in the normal schools here was exactly similar to what ought to take place in India. The Education Committee here, in consequence of the treatment of the religious question by the Privy Council, had resolved that vigorous efforts should be put forth to see that their certificated masters receive a still more thorough religious instruction than hitherto. That was precisely the remedy in India, where all depended on the men sent out by the Church as missionaries, and not on any University system. If they were to take the worst view of it, and retire from their colleges altogether, they would simply leave Satan to work his own will, leave the field to him, and find that they would be glad to go back and resume the work under very great disadvantages.

The very existence of Universities in India at so early a period as 1857, was due to two men, Dr Duff and Mr John Marshman, C.S.I. Up to 1854 the whole of the public funds and rewards devoted to education were confined to secular and

godless schools and colleges, directly conducted and controlled by the State. Not only the missionaries, but all Hindoos and Mussulmans, and those English and East Indian gentlemen who conducted such successful institutions as the Doveton College of Calcutta at their own cost, were kept at a distance, and, to that extent, steadily discouraged. The evidence given, before Parliamentary Committees, in 1853, by Dr Duff and Mr Marshman—the latter the son of Carey's great colleague at Serampore, and perhaps the most generous supporter of Christian education India has ever seen—induced the present Lord Halifax, then President of the Board of Control, to adopt and sign the famous educational despatch of 1854. That despatch gave India three catholic universities, and the fair system of grants in aid, while pledging Government to retire gradually from its own secular colleges, and to devote its strength on the one hand, to grants-in-aid as in England, on the other, to the education of the millions of the people in their own vernaculars. What has been the result, so far as the higher instruction is concerned? Missionaries, and Christian men, as well as educated men of all creeds not in the service of the Government, are represented with State officials in the senates and syndicates of the Universities. Perhaps the most distinguished Vice-Chancellor the University of Bombay has had, has been our own ex-Moderator, Dr John Wilson. Missionaries are represented in, and in my experience have full influence on, the University committees, which fix the curricula of studies, and select the standards and text-books affecting the education of the whole of India. Much has yet to be done. Non-Government interests, whether missionary or not, are not yet sufficiently represented in the Universities, and the vested interests of the Educational departments try to prevent the Government of India from retiring from its expensive colleges, and educating the ignorant masses. But we are now working on sound and catholic principles, and ultimate success depends chiefly on the men sent out as missionaries. The opinions expressed by some in this country regarding the educational work of our mission was not that expressed in India. On the contrary, it had been the glory of the Church to be identified with this educational system, and the educational system was found to be so thoroughly evangelistic as directed against Hindooism and Mohammedanism—he held it to be more thoroughly evangelistic in this way than any other system—that it had been taken hold of by other missionary agencies in India, and every other society had simply imitated their course. Where there used to be one missionary college in Bengal—and that well known, throughout the whole native community, as Duff's School—they had now six missionary colleges in and around Calcutta, turning out young men saturated with Divine truth, and gradually, he believed, sapping the vast structure of Hindooism and Mohammedanism, which one day, however distant as men judge, must fall to the ground.

Very different are the agencies required to evangelise the simple aborigines of India, on hill or plain. Dr Smith congratulated Mr Templeton, or whoever might go out to that field, upon being the first missionary appointed in this Church to lay the foundation of a new missionary work and machinery among the Santals. There was no success in modern missions—certainly no success in Indian missions—so great as that which had been won during the last three years among the Santals, where Mr Templeton was going to labour. In a country as large as England, the Church and the Baptist Missionary Societies have already occupied portions of the

field. There is ample room for a Presbyterian, a Free Church Mission, which, on the assurance of the Church Missionary who had already won such triumphs in the Rajmahal district, would be welcomed by the Church of England. He (Dr Smith) had more than once travelled through the country which rises from the heat and damp of Lower Bengal gradually into the uplands of Behar, and the out-crop of the great Vindhya range. A more promising field for evangelisation does not exist, and the selection of a site for the central station reflected great credit on the judgment of the Rev. Mr Don, the valued Free Church minister of Calcutta, and of Dr M. Mitchell, our able and zealous senior missionary there. Nor should this Church omit to recognise the liberality of that Indian merchant prince, who, on this as on so many other occasions, has taken much of the pecuniary burden on himself. Dr Smith next referred to the Chair of Evangelistic Theology, and congratulated the Church on the excellent results likely to flow from that chair, which would make it the envy of other Churches. That chair was the only institution which any Protestant Church had to point to as a parallel to the Propaganda, which had interested him during two recent visits to Rome, more than any other ecclesiastical institution in the great city. When the Missionary Institute had been added, the parallel would be perfect, so far as that was desirable. During a recent interview with the Committee of the Church Missionary Society, he found that the chair excited great interest in England.

In conclusion, Dr Smith called the attention of the Assembly to the fact, that since the Disruption the average home income for foreign missions was only £13,100 a year. This includes the results of special efforts to clear off debt in 1864 and 1866. An analysis of the very clear accounts in the report should startle the laity of this Church into a higher sense of their duty to its foreign missions. Last year, both at home and in India and Africa, the whole sum expended in the name of the Church for these missions was £35,800. This looks well, and would be well, if even the half of it were contributed by the Church. But what is the truth? Of the whole sum, £14,000 was raised in India itself. He would commend to all who still doubted the propriety of maintaining our colleges, the fact that no less than £9,330 of this latter sum was contributed by Government as grants-in-aid, and by students as fees—a sum practically equivalent to the whole salaries of missionaries, European and Native, in India, which were last year £9,459. Thus the colleges may in truth be left to those on the spot who can best judge of facts as they are. Of the £18,123, which represents the income in this country, so much is temporary and fluctuating from legacies and donations, that it was discreditable, to quote one to whom this House would listen when the speaker could have no such authority—"I am ashamed of the shabby sum of £14,000 raised annually by the Free Church of Scotland for this work, especially in view of the exertions that had been made to stimulate the Churches by Dr Duff. I am more hopeful of the English Presbyterians than of the cold Northerners." These were the words of Dr Wilson, who, when still Moderator of the General Assembly, had thus addressed, a fortnight ago, one of the largest and most enthusiastic meetings which had ever been witnessed in Exeter Hall—a meeting to aid the foreign missions of this Church, and of her zealous, liberal, and broad-minded sister Church in England. If they contrasted this amount with the reputation in which this Church stood, and deservedly so, in connection with these foreign missions; if they contrasted it

with the sums contributed proportionately by other Presbyterian Churches, as well as with the sums raised by the religious societies in England, they must confess that it was much too small. He would impress upon the Assembly, and upon those 274 congregations who had not found it proper to establish associations for foreign missions, that the sum annually raised for foreign missions by the Free Church was not in keeping with the sums contributed by the Church to other funds. He trusted that the proceedings in this Assembly would have the effect of arousing the Church to a higher sense of its duty in this department of its work. As Free Churchmen, they felt that the Church was developing and broadening, but was not yet what it would be. He could speak for Free Churchmen, and for many Christian men outside of Scotland, who watched the course of that development, and the efforts made to increase that breadth, till the most vigorous of sects became the nucleus of a true National Church—in time, he trusted, of one National Church. But, however soon or late that result may be reached, and by whatever means, the glory of the Free Church must more than hitherto be identified with the growing success and extension of its foreign missions. This was demanded, alike by its own ecclesiastical reputation and its own true spirituality. As the Church increased in its devotion to foreign missions, and in its subscriptions to the cause, only then will it be a Church worthy of the praise of men in all lands, and fully justify the praise of many who long doubted its success.

Gaylord
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